



Statement by Mr. Bořek Lizec, Consul General of the Czech Republic in Chicago on the occasion of the 150 anniversary of Sokol St. Louis, the first Sokol unit in the United States of America (St. Louis, on Saturday, February 14, 2015)

Dear Sokols, dear friends,

First of all, please allow me to thank you that you invited me as a representative of the Czech Republic on this truly historic occasion.

Sokol St. Louis was founded 150 years ago, only three years later than the first Sokol on the territory of the Czech Republic.

Sokol organization is older (by more than 50 years) than the modern Czech (Czechoslovak) statehood. It was in fact the Sokol organization that played such a key role in the creation of Czechoslovak Republic in 1918. The Sokols, not only from our homeland, but also from abroad, including from the United States of America, fought in the Czechoslovak legions in the First World War, they resisted the Nazi occupation and opposed also the communist totalitarian regime. However, the contribution of Sokol to the development of the Czech nation and its state, cannot, of course, by any means be reduced to the military and political realm.

“Ve zdravém těle, zdravý duch.” “In a healthy body, a healthy - educated mind.” The implementation of this idea into the life of Sokols was to lead to the advancement of an individual as well as the nation. The idea, no matter how simple it may seem at the first glance, proved to be a brilliant recipe at the time of its formulation and continues to be a just as brilliant recipe today and for the future.

I have heard many times that Czechs tend to assimilate rather quickly when immigrating to other countries, that they loose their relationship to the old country quicker than in the case of some other nations.

If Czechs, as a relatively small nation, indisputably contributed on a rather large scale to the development of some part of the world, I think that it can be said about the U.S. Midwest. Yesterday I had a discussion with an American of German ancestry and he told me that he envies us Czechs the impressive history that we can refer to here. In his words, Germany does not have Ray Kroc, Anton Cermak, Kim Novak, George Halas, Pilsen neighborhood – only when talking about Chicago.

The glorious era of Czechs in the Midwest – in terms of numbers – seems to be over for a rather long time, for example the times when Soldier Field stadium, home of Bears owned by George Halas, was filled by Sokols during a slet.

However, it is Sokol organizations (almost exclusively) that still carry the Czech flag throughout the Midwest. The Czech flag still flies high over their Sokol Halls. As a Czech and the representative of the Czech Republic for the US Midwest, I would like to express my deep gratitude for your not having forgotten about your Czech roots, for having done quite the opposite.

I really hope that the Czech flag will continue to fly here thanks to you. I am very much aware that American Sokol has today a much more diverse membership and that the development of the sense of unity (linked with the individual advancement) is more about community and United States than the Czech nation. However, there is luckily absolutely no contradiction. As at the time of the first Czechoslovak President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the US and the Czech Republic are the closest allies. Czechs once again stand practically on all issues by the US that helped our country so many times in the last century to gain freedom.

This year we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution, the fall of communism in the Czech Republic. I see this anniversary also as the anniversary of the reunification of Czechs in the homeland with you Czech-Americans, reunification of Czech Sokols and Czech-American Sokols. The Czech Sokols just as the whole society have been through a difficult time for long decades. It will still take some time before we fully overcome the sad heritage of the totalitarian regimes. The Sokols in the Czech Republic have had a model to look up to during this process - you, their American brothers and sisters.

Please accept my sincere congratulations on your incredible anniversary!

Nazdar!